



THE NAVAJO NATION

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President Begaye demands U.S. EPA release information on contaminants



President Begaye and Vice President Nez encourage the public to remain safe after the Animas River was contaminated with toxic waste from the Gold King Mine in Silverton, Colo. on Aug. 5, 2015. (KOB-TV courtesy photo)

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.—An environmental catastrophe.

That is how many people are describing the Gold King Mine incident that occurred on August 5, around 10:30 a.m.

A team working for the U.S. EPA released more than 1 million gallons of wastewater containing acidic water and other unknown contaminants into the Animas River. The incident occurred in Silverton, Colo.

The river water immediately changed to an orange color and the city of Durango shutdown water pumping from the river. The river was also closed to the general public for safety concerns.

Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye has called for the release of information by the U.S. EPA on the contaminants that were discharged into the river.

"We are demanding from the U.S. EPA an

immediate release of detailed information on the type of contaminants that is flowing into the river from the Gold King Mine," President Begaye said. "This is an all too familiar story on the lax oversight responsibility of the U.S. government.

"It is unfortunate that we have to once again tell our people to stay away from the river due to the release of dangerous chemicals into our water," he added.

Thomas McNamara, emergency management coordinator for La Plata County, said the sheriff ordered closure of the Animas River until further notice.

"The material has made it within about two to three hours of the Durango city limits. Much of the material is dropping out through the slow meanders in the valley. We are waiting for the results of the water tests by the EPA," McNamara said.

He said that drinking water and the aquatic wildlife are the biggest concern right now.

Vice President Jonathan Nez said farmers along the San Juan River must be cautious.

"The contamination will probably hit Lake Powell soon. And to the community of Mexican Hat, which pumps drinking water from the river, please proceed with caution. We need to monitor the water to ensure it is potable," Vice President Nez said.

President Begaye has put several tribal programs on standby to monitor the river for the safety of tribal members.

"We have alerted Navajo EPA, Department of Health, and Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program to inform our people about the dangers of using contaminated water. Be on alert, take care of your children, pets and livestock near the river," President Begaye said.

The community hotline for the La Plata County Emergency Operations Center is 970-382-8700.